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871 562 will produce better mothers, or birth control and cheaper typists, is a question for the future.

9. Vernacular Education

872 So far we have been dealing in the main with western education, and have seen that the prospect of gain is sufficient to crowd the schools beyond capacity, but only so far, and in such directions, as they lead to a remunerative certificate; and that all values, other than examination values, are at a discount. Primary vernacular education provides the obverse of this picture because, in general, it does not pay; it is merely an instrument of human welfare. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the diffusion of general enlightenment in India through primary instruction has been a main objective of humanitarian sympathy; this principle was adopted and placed in the forefront of official policy from the middle of the century, and it was reaffirmed by Curzon at its close. Yet the progress achieved 'is shown by statistics admitted by the highest educational authorities to be thoroughly unsatisfactory',[1] and in Burma, which started the nineteenth century under native rule with a literate male population, the picture of primary instruction after a hundred years of British rule is 'one of almost unrelieved gloom'.[2] For over a hundred years there has been general agreement in India that primary instruction is the most effective instrument of material and moral welfare, yet, so far as there has been any progress under either head since the time of Wilberforce and Carey, it certainly cannot be attributed to the spread of primary instruction. This has not spread because there has been no demand for it. Now that it is again proclaimed with new insistence as the chief aim of modern educational policy in the tropics generally, some examination of the grounds on which it has been advocated seems expedient. Apart from humanitarian considerations they fall under two heads, political and economic.

872 212 Many have urged the spread of vernacular instruction on grounds of political convenience. Curzon cited with approval the dictum that 'among all sources of administrative difficulty and political danger, few are so serious as the ignorance of the people'.[3] This view is still widely held. Mass education is recommended as a safeguard against explosive temper liable to produce a social upheaval. One is told that 'an increase of literacy makes the people easier to control and govern',

[1] Mayhew, *India*, p. 226.
[2] *CVV*, p. 156.
[3] *RPI* (India), 1897–1902, p. 462; *Mass Education*, p. 7; Mayhew, *India*, p. 226.

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and that 'it is pleasanter and cheaper to mould a literate population by appropriate and intelligent methods of education than to suppress an illiterate mob by machine guns'. There is very little evidence for such assertions, and certainly experience in Netherlands India and Burma contradicts them. The Dutch, when ruling an illiterate people through their native chieftains, had less difficulty in preserving *rust en orde*, and in moulding the people to their will, than in recent years when literacy has been making rapid progress. In the serious outbreak of 1926, though few of the rebels were highly educated, many had gone far beyond the common man in schooling. In Burma, with a high proportion of literates, there has been greater difficulty than in Java in maintaining law and order, and in obtaining a ready compliance with Government policy; on the contrary, districts conspicuous for literacy are also conspicuous for crime, and of the rebels in 1931 most would have passed for highly educated men in Africa. The early Liberals believed that education would automatically strengthen the ties between India and Britain; Curzon, finding this belief mistaken, tried to stimulate loyalty by hanging up portraits of the King in schools. In Burma there were attempts during the war of 1914–18 to use the schools for spreading 'the imperial idea', and 'to foster a sense of personal attachment to the King-Emperor'.[1] In French dependencies the schools try to evoke an admiration of France, and in Belgian dependencies an affection for Belgium.[2] But those who learn to read find little reading matter except newspapers, described in Netherlands India as 'cheap and nasty—like other things intended for tropical consumption', and often disaffected towards Government. Both in Burma and Java, long before the rise of modern Nationalism, the earliest native newspapers were critical of foreign rule, and the figures already given show that in Burma the circulation of periodicals varies directly with the violence of their attacks on Government. Under indirect rule the people learn from the newspapers to criticize not only the foreign Government but their own chieftains. There would seem little reason, therefore, to expect that the spread of primary instruction will increase docility, and even if it were true that primary instruction makes a people easier to control and govern, this would not induce illiterate parents who do not value education to send their children to the schools.

Others hold out a more tempting bait. They argue that undeveloped minds are incapable of political activities, and that 'in order to pro-

[1] *CII*, p. 5. [2] Mayhew, *Colonial Empire*, p. 143.

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gress towards self-government in the modern world colonial peoples must learn to read, and to understand, not only their own local affairs but those of wider import'.[1] Primary instruction is advocated as a first step towards 'responsible government', and therefore a condition of autonomy. But in the early nineteenth century, literacy was far more widely diffused in Burma than in Britain, yet this did not secure its independence. Even now the comparatively greater literacy of Burma does not seem to make it apter for western political institutions than Java, whereas Siam, with a smaller proportion of literates, has managed to remain independent. In Netherlands India, despite the spread of primary instruction during the past generation, it has been estimated that 167 years must elapse before the last illiterate is dragged to school, and in the Gold Coast, the most forward dependency in Africa in respect of education, the period has been put at 600 years.[2] Prospects of self-government at so remote a date are unlikely to kindle much enthusiasm for primary instruction, and critics have not unnaturally enquired whether its advocates wish to diffuse enlightenment or to delay self-government.

The recent project of mass education looks to the elimination of illiteracy in Africa within some thirty years.[3] That project, though optimistic, is not impossible if the people can be induced to want primary instruction. The prospect of self-government is an inducement; but it is also an illusion. 'Self-government' suggests that they will be free to do what they may want to do. But unless they want to do what, in the conditions of the modern world they must do, they will not be free, or even able to do it. To change their wants is much harder than to teach them letters and, without that, literacy may help them to express their dissatisfaction at not getting what they want, but it will make government more difficult and will raise a new obstacle to self-government. Literacy in itself is nothing. If it were possible to make the whole of Africa as literate to-morrow as Burma is to-day, it would be no more capable than Burma of managing western democratic institutions. Literacy may be an instrument of good or evil and, if tropical peoples are induced to acquire letters on the ground that this implies self-government, they will use the power of letters to vent their disappointment on those who have deceived them. Their profit will be that they know how to curse. Primary instruction, if recommended as

[1] *Britain and Her Dependencies*, p. 7; *Mass Education*, p. 14.
[2] *African Survey*, p. 1235; *HIOC*, Résumé, p. 76.
[3] *Mass Education*, pp. 10, 11.

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a step towards self-government, is more likely to cause than to cure an explosive temper and a social upheaval. It may not be impossible to teach tropical peoples their alphabet within a generation, but 'if means must be found and found quickly whereby the people as a *community* can understand and appreciate the forces which have changed and are changing their lives so radically' and 'to call out the ability and will to share in the direction and control of the social, economic and political forces', this end is more likely to be attained by educating the leaders of the community rather than through the mass education of individuals who, taken in the mass, are chiefly concerned, in Africa as elsewhere, with getting their daily bread, and do not hope or wish to meddle in matters that are too high for them. In this matter nationalist opinion, which insists on the education of leaders, is guided by a sound instinct, and the emphasis of colonial powers on primary instruction, however well intended, makes nationalists suspect that leaders are not wanted.

Among the advocates of primary instruction on economic grounds one can also hear two voices. Those who are chiefly concerned with economic progress urge that it will make the native more profitable as a coolie. 'If he is to work harder, longer and more continuously, education must inculcate the ideas of sanctity of contract and of ordinary honesty to his employers.'[1] This appeal to the sanctity of contract—the only saint in the Calendar of Mammon—suggests that the coincidence between the modern emphasis on primary instruction and the discovery that unintelligent labour is uneconomic is not wholly fortuitous. In Malaya the project of opening special schools for immigrants was formerly regarded as a 'fatal error' creating a plural society by 'tending to keep them aliens and encouraging them in the idea that China or India is their home'. But shortly afterwards, the Government decided to open Tamil schools 'with the object of making the F.M.S. from the point of view of the Indian immigrant, an outlying province of India, like Ceylon'.[2] These schools, though recognized as detrimental to social welfare, were created in the interest of economic progress. Experience has shown that Tamil education 'is of value not only as an incentive to recruiting labour for the rubber estates, but as a means of keeping the Tamil labourer happy and contented',[3] and many plantations now have schools for

[1] Mayhew, *Colonial Empire*, p. 141.
[2] 1905, Cmd. 2379, p. 11, and 11 n.
[3] Sir George Maxwell, quoted Sidney, p. 203; Mills, pp. 340, 34[illegible]

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coolies. In Africa some western enterprises support schools under the right kind of missionary and although, so far, employers in general have displayed little interest in the matter, it is thought that 'shortage of labour in some African areas may dispose them to offer facilities for education, in addition to provisions for general welfare, as an inducement to workers to stay in one place and become more efficient'.[1] Doubtless human sympathy plays a large part in the establishment of schools on western enterprise, but economic interest stimulates this sympathy, and the substantial contributions from Government and from missionary bodies towards the cost of education help to reduce the cost of wages. Education in the name of welfare becomes an instrument of economic progress even to the detriment of social welfare, as with the fostering of communal separation in Malaya. In any case the diffusion of primary instruction among the general public depends not on the demand of employers for more intelligent labour, but on the demand of parents for more schools, and they will not send their children to school in order that they may 'work harder, longer and more continuously' on western enterprise.

Most advocates of primary instruction, however, state the case, more persuasively, on grounds of native welfare. Curzon held that it would help the cultivator in his transactions with moneylenders, merchants and officials. Many claim that it will not only help the cultivators in their business but will enable officials to teach them better agricultural methods, the principles of co-operative credit and modern hygiene.[2] 'Every health measure, every improvement of agricultural methods, the co-operative machinery for production and distribution, the establishment of secondary industries—all these will make increasing demands upon the people and they will be able to respond only if they have had some educational opportunities.'[3] This sounds plausible, and some hold that it is proved. 'So far in the British Colonies we have acted on the assumption that people would eventually adopt improved methods of agriculture, hygienic surroundings and western medical ideas without learning to read and write.... It has been proved that the attainment of literacy makes people aware of the need for social and economic improvements, and therefore they will co-operate more readily with welfare and other agencies working on these lines.'[4] It would be difficult to find another

[1] *Mass Education*, p. 27. [2] Mayhew, *India*, p. 226.
[3] Colonial Secretary, House of Commons, 13 July 1943.
[4] *Mass Education*, p. 14.

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example of so many fallacies in so few words. It is not true that we have acted on this assumption, and it is not true that literacy entails better living. On the other hand people take to better living without literacy, for they will take over from the West anything that they find profitable, even education. But education when sought as a means of individual profit is not an instrument of welfare, not even of individual welfare, because it injures social welfare. The assumption is against all probability, and, as will appear below, is contradicted by the facts.

It is certainly not the case that we have tried to improve the condition of the people before teaching them to read and write. In India the diffusion of primary instruction had been a main object of policy for half a century before the promotion of hygiene and other objects of social welfare received serious attention. Since about 1900 it has been advocated as a means of improving hygiene. But the people, in general, have been no more responsive to the efforts to encourage primary instruction than to the efforts to promote hygiene. They did not want to learn to read and write because it would not pay.

Again, the suggestion that literacy leads to better living will not stand the most cursory examination. Doubtless in Singapore the proportion of literacy is higher among the Chinese who live in palaces than among the Chinese of the slums: but the former do not live in palaces because they are literate, they are literate because they can live in palaces. Literacy is often expected to encourage thrift. But if a man wants to borrow money he will sign his name as readily as he will make his mark, though, as a signature is less easy to repudiate, the transaction is really more imprudent. When he sells his crops, literacy will not raise the price fixed by a ring of buyers. In Burma debt is most burdensome in tracts with the highest proportion of literates, and in these tracts co-operative credit was the greatest failure. All over the Tropical Far East literacy under native rule was far more widely diffused than in India or Africa, but it has not kept the people out of debt. Also if so much is expected from vernacular literacy, one would expect more from the higher standard of literacy attained by those acquainted with a European language. Yet in Burma, and probably elsewhere, we find clerks in Government service and commercial firms heavily indebted to illiterate menials. Similarly indebtedness prevails among subordinate officials, including judges and magistrates. In Java one hears of Regents in the clutches of Chinese moneylenders. In the Philippines, for all the efforts of the

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American Government to promote literacy, agricultural debt seems worse than in Malaya, and even candidates for the local representative assembly, who are presumably among the more highly educated, readily incur insolvency in their electoral campaigns.[1] For the promotion of thrift and better business methods, the attainment of literacy in itself is nothing, nor has literacy enabled administrations to promote thriftiness. Create an environment that puts a premium on thrift, imbue the people with a spirit of thriftiness, and literacy, though unessential, will be helpful.

But if literacy can do so little in helping the people to improve their economic position and get the things they value, no one can expect it to be more effective in changing their standard of values, in leading them voluntarily to accept the restrictions on personal liberty, involved in modern western hygiene. We have noticed that even the teachers of hygiene do not practise what they preach, and those who give and receive these lessons are all literate. Where a comparatively high degree of literacy has such poor results, universal primary instruction is unlikely to be more effective. If, as is commonly believed, people will not 'adopt improved methods of agriculture, a more nutritious diet, hygienic surroundings and western medical ideas without learning to read and write', they will not adopt them the more readily merely for being taught their alphabet.

In point of fact, however, this common belief is wrong. It is untrue that people must learn to read and write in order to attain greater welfare. We have noticed that throughout the tropics in both Africa and Asia, cultivators, literate or illiterate, have taken to new crops and new kinds of food. In Java, despite illiteracy, the standard of rural hygiene, unsatisfactory as it may seem to the Dutch, has long presented a striking contrast with conditions in most parts of the tropics. If people can be induced to want social and economic improvements they will value literacy, both in itself and as an instrument of other aspects of social advance, but in itself literacy will not inspire them with new wants.

Literacy is one sign of civilization. The Burmese are literate, and stand on a higher plane of civilization than the surrounding hill tribes; but they are more literate because they are more civilized, and not more civilized because they are more literate. Some of these hill tribes are Karens. Missionary work has made great progress among the Karens, and among Christian Karens there is a higher standard

[1] Mills, p. 276; Malcolm, pp. 171, 212, 220.

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of literacy, and a far higher standard of female literacy than among the Burmese. But the Karens did not learn to read and write in order to become Christians; they learned to read and write because they had become Christians. Social progress led to economic progress, and both social and economic progress are reflected in their literacy. Similarly the Burmese are not Buddhists because they learn to read and write, but they learn to read and write because they are Buddhists Literacy is a sign and not a cause of social progress. Inspire tropical peoples with a desire for western standards of social life and they will want, among other things, to read and write; but the ability to read and write will not inspire them with a desire for social or economic progress. It is true that in Russia and China there has recently been great progress both in literacy and in the general standard of living, but that is because a new spirit has descended on them. In Malaya the people remained apathetic in respect of schooling until 'the Malay rulers turned to education to equip their subjects to hold their own against the educated Indian and the intellectual and energetic Chinese'.[1] Similarly in Java the modern growth of literacy has been stimulated by the appeal to patriotism. But, without a complete transformation of the social and economic environment, literacy alone will help the people no better than it has helped the Burmese. 'Even if popular education were made universal and compulsory throughout the dependencies, it would not in itself produce a revolution in social outlook such as seems, for instance to have been effected in Soviet Russia and to some extent in China.'[2]

The easiest way to diffuse primary instruction is to make it pay. That is the way in which western instruction spread. Where, as frequently in urban areas, literacy has an economic value, or where it confers a higher social standing, many lads will pick up reading and writing without special facilities and without encouragement. We can see this in Africa, where 'in some areas a number of them have had a smattering of education, often quite unrelated to their environment and to the possibilities of employment. But this smattering, which includes the three R's, represents the intention of their parents that their children shall have *some* education, and expresses an almost pathetic belief in the inherent value of learning to read and write'.[3] Yet mere literacy has no intrinsic value; it has a scarcity value, and enables those who can read and write to earn more. Parents who

[1] *RPI* (Malaya), 1938, p. 8.
[2] *Britain and Her Dependencies*, p. 33.
[3] *Mass Education*, p. 18.

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872 believe this will send their children to vernacular schools so that they can earn more, just as in the past they have sent their children, often at great sacrifice, to western schools, and with the same result, but on a vastly wider scale, of producing discontent when the supply of those who can read and write is in excess of the demand. If vernacular education be recommended to the people as a means of individual advancement, it may provide more intelligent and more economic labour, but it will be perverted, like western education, from an instrument of welfare into an instrument of progress and its expansion will be governed by the demand for labour. The problem is to find some non-economic motive sufficient to induce parents to send their children to school. If such a motive can be found, then the more who go to school the better.

10. Native Education

871 While vernacular instruction has languished, native education has declined. It was formerly the strength of native education that it was based on ideas transcending the economic sphere. It taught them how to live. Now that the world in which it taught them how to live has vanished, the native schools decay. In Burma the monastic schools have lost much of their social value through the drainage of their wealthier and brighter pupils into western schools. In towns they have suffered also from the competition of lay schools, feeding the western schools, providing candidates for subordinate vernacular appointments, and attracting others who for various reasons are content with secular instruction. It has been the policy of the Government to adapt them to the modern world. 'The method of translating the policy into practice varied from time to time, but the variations played on a single theme—the secularization of the curriculum and methods of the monastic school.'[1] The monastic schools sufficed to provide magistrates and judges, so long as no other schools were available, but they did not fit into a scheme based on the assumption that efficiency in education could be tested by the acquisition of certificates qualifying for appointments, and they could not compete with the better lay schools in getting boys quickly through their examinations. Thus they were driven into the backwoods. There was no need to secularize western education, though it was largely in the hands of missionaries, for missionary schools, no less than lay schools, are dominated by the cult of the certificate, and now, as we have noted, the problem is 'how to spiritual-

[1] *CVV*, p. 131.